

Photographer's Guide to the Panasonic Lumix LX5

**Getting the Most from Panasonic's
Advanced Digital Camera**

**Addendum for
Firmware Version 2.0**

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Addendum

Update to Firmware Version 2.0 for the Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX5

On September 13, 2011, Panasonic issued version 2.0 of the firmware for the Lumix DMC-LX5 camera. This is a relatively major upgrade, because it not only tweaks a few existing features for better performance, it also adds some new menu options, and even adds one completely new special effect to those that were already available in the My Color shooting mode. I will discuss each of the enhancements or additions made by the firmware upgrade, in the order that they are discussed in the list that Panasonic posted on the web page where the firmware can be downloaded.

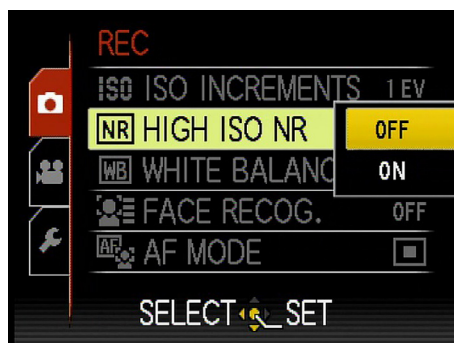
Here is the overall list of enhancements and additions:

1. Autofocus speed has been improved.
2. The Recording menu has a new option, High ISO NR.
3. Auto white balance performance has been improved.
4. The Motion Picture menu has a new option, Active Mode.
5. There is an enhancement to the process of locking exposure and focus by pressing the shutter button halfway.
6. There is new process for adjusting manual focus with an assist from the autofocus system.

7. The camera will now store the position and size of the autofocus area you have set.
8. The maximum length for setting shutter speed in Manual exposure mode has been raised from 60 seconds to 250 seconds.
9. The Miniature effect option has been added to the My Color shooting mode.
10. A new option has been added to the Setup menu, which is called LCD Display when the LCD is in use, and which is called Viewfinder when the optional electronic viewfinder is attached and is active. This option provides adjustments for brightness and color of the display.

I will discuss below the details for each of the new features. I won't talk about items numbers 1 and 3—improvements to autofocus speed and auto white balance—because neither of those items requires the user to understand any new menu items or procedures. The other items on the list, though, all need some discussion.

High ISO NR

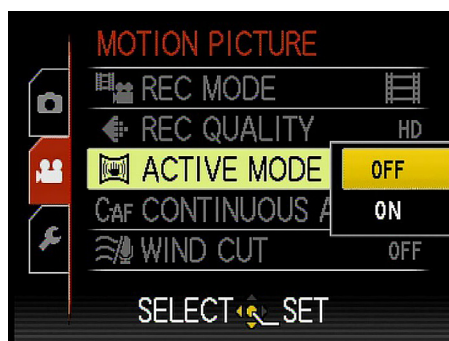


This new item on the Recording menu lets you turn on or off the camera's internal noise reduction function for shots taken

at ISO 1600 or 3200. Ordinarily, when the ISO is set that high, there is likely to be visible noise that degrades the appearance of the image. With the previous firmware version, the LX5 automatically applied noise reduction at high ISO settings. The only way to change the amount of noise reduction was to adjust that parameter for one of the Film Mode settings on the Recording menu.

Now, with the High ISO NR menu option, you can elect to turn off the high ISO noise reduction processing. You may want to do this if you don't want to wait while the camera applies the noise reduction, which can take several seconds. In particular, if you are using continuous shooting, noise reduction can slow things down quite a bit, defeating the purpose of the burst shooting capability. In addition, in some cases you might not object to the presence of noise, which can produce a grainy effect that is pleasing to the eye in some contexts. Also, even if it reduces the presence of noise, the noise reduction processing can have the effect of reducing the detail in your images.

Active Mode for Motion Picture Recording



This new item on the Motion Picture menu gives you an additional option for stabilizing your video sequences. The Active Mode option, which can be set either on or off, is available in several shooting modes, not just when the camera is set to Creative Motion Picture mode. When the camera is set to the

Auto shooting mode, the Active Mode option is automatically turned on and cannot be turned off.

As you may recall, you can press the red Movie button to start recording a movie at any time, and in any shooting mode. If you do so in Program, Aperture Priority, or the other non-automatic shooting modes, you can use the Stabilizer item on the Recording menu to help reduce camera shake. Now, with the Active Mode option, you can add a second form of stabilization. This second method of stabilization is electronic, rather than optical, the system used by the Stabilizer option.

I recommend turning this option on whenever you are hand-holding the camera to shoot movies. When the camera is on a tripod, you should probably turn this option off.

Locking Focus and Exposure with Shutter Button

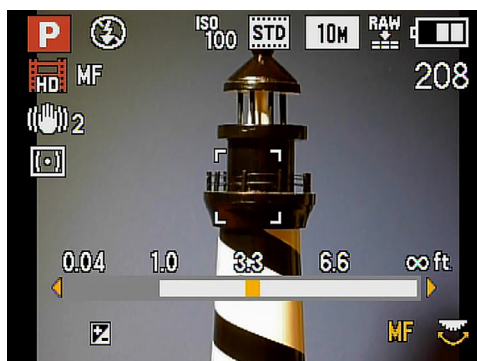
The next enhancement added by firmware version 2.0 does not involve a menu option, but a change in how the shutter button operates to lock focus and exposure. With the original firmware, you could press the shutter button down halfway to lock focus and exposure, but, after you pressed it all the way to take the picture, the locking would end and you would have to start over to lock focus and exposure again. With the new system, after you press the shutter button down halfway to lock focus and exposure, you have the option of letting the button back up to the halfway point, which will maintain the locked values, so you can then compose another shot and shoot again with the same values.

Personally, I have found this a bit tricky to accomplish, because it's easy to let the button up too far, in which case it returns to its fully "up" position, and loses the locked values. But if you watch the display and let up the button so as to keep the focus frame on the screen, you can maintain the locked values. Of course, you can use the AF/AE Lock button to lock focus

and exposure at any time also, in many situations. However, that button cannot be used to lock these values when you are shooting with the Scene modes. So, in that situation, the new procedure may be useful if you need to lock your exposure and focus values for multiple shots.

Adjusting Manual Focus

Next, Panasonic has provided the user with some refinements that help you get a jump-start on focusing manually, if you want an assist from the autofocus mechanism. To take advantage of this new capability, set the focus switch on the left of the lens to the MF position to enable manual focus. Then press the Focus button (which is the top direction button on the camera's control pad), and the camera will focus with the autofocus mechanism, if possible.



That process is not completely new; with the original firmware, you could press the Focus button to use autofocus while in manual focus mode. What is new with version 2.0 of the firmware is that, once you press the Focus button, the camera places a focus bar on the display with the focus point shown on the scale, so you can start adjusting the focus immediately, using either the left and right direction buttons or the rear dial. This new system can be a time-saver when you want the camera to set an approximate focus distance for you automatically and then take you immediately to the screen that lets you

fine-tune the position yourself.

Storing Position of Autofocus Area

This next feature, like the previous one, is an enhancement that is intended to make your photographic life a bit easier. With the original firmware, when you turned the camera off it would not remember the position of your autofocus area frame. That is, if you had selected 1-area for the AF Area and then moved the focus frame around the screen, once the camera was turned off, the frame would appear back in the middle of the screen. If you wanted to move it off to one side as you had it before, you would have to start all over again.



With version 2.0, the camera retains the position of the focus frame in its memory, even after the camera has been powered off. With that capability, if you want to have the frame in the same position for multiple shooting sessions, you don't have to keep moving it back to that position. If at some point you want the frame back in the center of the screen, you can just press the Focus button to activate the frame, and then press the Display button to send it immediately back to the center.

The camera will also now remember the size of the autofocus frame, if you have used the rear dial to change the frame's size while the frame was activated. (With the original firmware, the size of the autofocus frame was reset whenever the camera was turned off.)

Longer Shutter Speeds in Manual Mode

With the original version of the firmware, the LX5 offered shutter speeds as long as 60 seconds in Manual exposure mode. Now, with version 2.0, you can set the shutter speed to considerably longer durations, up to 250 seconds. The new settings that are available are 80, 100, 125, 160, 200, and 250 seconds, all set with the rear dial as was the case with the original firmware. The shutter speeds available in other shooting modes have not changed.



You may want to take advantage of the longer shutter speeds for night-time photos of celestial bodies, or for creative purposes, such as capturing images of light trails from automobiles' headlights and the like, particularly in a situation in which the cars don't come by in rapid succession, so you need to leave the shutter open for a long time to get a good collection of light trails.

Miniature Effect

This enhancement is possibly the biggest news of the version 2.0 firmware upgrade, because it gives you a capability that was not present at all with the earlier version. Miniature effect is a setting that has been added to the My Color shooting mode, along with what was already a very useful array of ef-

fects, including choices such as Retro, Expressive, High Dynamic, and Dynamic Art.

This new feature produces an effect similar to one that is available with some camera models from Nikon and Canon, among others. The idea with this effect is to take a picture or a movie with certain settings that make the subject seem like a miniature model of the real thing. In other words, if you take a picture of your house, the image will be processed in such a way as to look like a doll house, or a model building from a tabletop train layout.

I have to admit that I was puzzled when I first saw this effect on other cameras; I always thought that model makers, at least those who work for movie studios, would film models and try to make you think they are the real thing, not the other way around. But evidently there is some degree of enthusiasm for this sort of effect, and I will admit that it can look fairly impressive when done well, as a sort of artistic achievement.

Here is how to use this feature. You set the mode dial to the My Color shooting mode, and then scroll through the selections until you come to Miniature Effect. Once the label for that setting is displayed, press the right direction button to move to the screen for adjusting the saturation, or intensity, of the colors in the image. Use the right and left direction buttons to adjust it to your liking, then press the Menu/Set button to confirm the setting.

Next, press the Fn button (down button) to start adjusting the location of the yellow rectangle that appears on the screen. This rectangle, which extends either horizontally or vertically across the screen, represents the area in which the image will remain clearly focused. The area outside the rectangle will become defocused and blurry, which is how the “miniature effect” is simulated. The idea is that, when miniatures are filmed, the camera used has a narrow depth of field, and only a certain

part of the miniature scene can be in sharp focus.



Use the down button to activate the rectangle, and then use the up and down buttons to position it just where you want it. Next, use the rear dial to adjust the size of the rectangle to one of its three widths—narrow, medium, or large. Ideally, you will be able to position and size the rectangle so that it covers a part of the image that naturally stands out as a unified part of the scene, such as a railroad track, a street, or a house. If you want to change the rectangle from horizontal to vertical orientation, press the right direction button; to change from vertical to horizontal, press the down button. If at any time you want to reset the size and position of the rectangle to their original status, press the Display button.

Once you have the rectangle positioned, oriented, and sized the way you want it, press the Menu/Set button to confirm the settings, and you are ready to take the picture. Several menu settings are disabled when the Miniature effect is active, including bracketing and burst shooting; ISO is fixed to Auto, and so is white balance.

Finally, you can also use the Miniature effect for shooting movies. When you do so, the movies are speeded up to about ten times normal speed (eight times for AVCHD Lite movies), and no sound is recorded. The resulting effect, with speeding cars, trucks, trains, or people, for example, adds to the illusion

that a miniature model was being filmed.



Actually, I believe this feature is more entertaining and dramatic when used with movies than with still shots, if you choose your subject carefully and line up the elements so the most active and important areas (such as a large highway or train tracks) is lined up with the in-focus area within the rectangular frame.

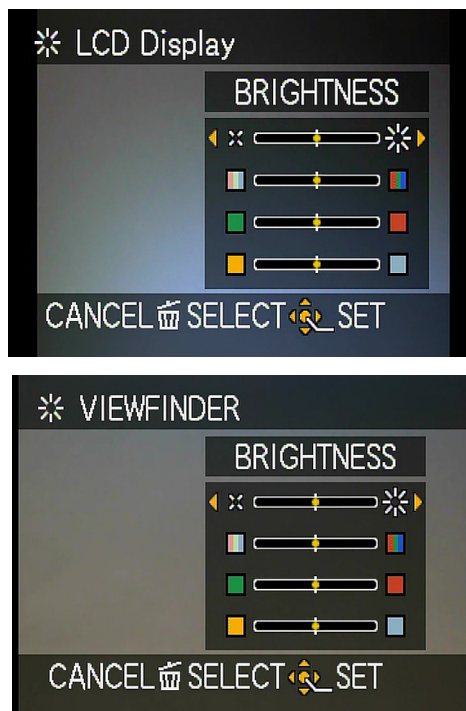
You can see an example movie, using the scene shown above, at the whiteknightpress.com web site; find the first blog post for September 16, 2011, or search for the term “miniature effect” and find the post titled “Another Miniature Effect Movie with the Panasonic Lumix LX5.”

LCD Display/Viewfinder Menu Option

The last enhancement made by version 2.0 of the LX5 firmware is to add a new option to the Setup menu that gives you more control over the brightness of the display screen—either the LCD display or the optional electronic viewfinder, depending on which one is in use at the time you use this option. The new menu item appears on the line right after Fn Button Set on the Setup menu.

The documentation provided by Panasonic with the firmware upgrade mistakenly calls this menu option “Monitor/View-

finder.” In fact, it is called either “LCD Display” (not “Monitor”) or “Viewfinder,” depending on which display device is being used. That is, if you are using the LCD, this menu item is called “LCD Display.” However, if you have attached the optional electronic viewfinder and activated it by pressing its on button, then this menu item changes, and it appears as “Viewfinder” on the Setup menu.



In either case, the option operates in the same way. Once you have highlighted this menu item, press the right direction button to move to the next screen, where there are four different controls that affect different aspects of the display: From the top, they are brightness, contrast/saturation, red tint, and blue tint. Using these controls, which are adjusted using the four direction buttons, you can fine-tune the brightness and appearance of the display to suit your personal preference.